

3D app uncovers lost Mughrabi quarter of Jerusalem's Old City

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More than 55 years after Israel destroyed the Moroccan quarter of Jerusalem's Old City, it has been rebuilt in 3D with the help of a mobile phone application launched Thursday.

Once located at the foot of the Western Wall, the Moroccan, or Mughrabi, quarter was inhabited by about 1,000 people until Israeli forces captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Israel demolished the neighborhood and went on to annex east Jerusalem—a move deemed illegal by the United Nations.

In just a few hours, Israeli bulldozers tore through more than 100 buildings, displacing residents of the neighborhood, founded in 1187 by Saladin who defeated the Crusaders in Jerusalem.

The ancient leader had established the quarter for Muslim pilgrims from North Africa. Today it serves as a plaza in front of one of Judaism's most sacred sites.

"I think 99 per cent of visitors who are in front of the Western Wall know nothing of this history," French historian Vincent Lemire told AFP.

Working with Italy's University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Lemire developed a [mobile application](#) allowing people to stroll through each alley.

The application's designers said it "allows users an immersive experience across the streets, mosques, schools, and courtyards of the Maghrebi quarter".

Lemire, who authored a book on the neighborhood in 2022, said the 3D technology makes it possible to reach a wider audience than in academic writings.

"The history of this neighborhood is inaccessible, it must be made more accessible," he said.

In a press conference to launch the application, Ashraf al-Jandoubi al-Mughrabi, a descendent of Tunisian residents of the quarter, said: "We will never forget our belonging to this district."

Lemire said the quarter was "very representative of the open history of Jerusalem that we are trying to promote, which bears little resemblance

to the current Jerusalem which has turned into a very simplistic and crude battlefield between two camps".

A dichotomy which, he said, "crushes all the other plural and diverse stories of Jerusalem."

In January 2023, excavations by Israeli archaeologists unearthed remains of the neighborhood, but experts were concerned about the fate of the ruins, which were buried soon after their discovery.

The 3D modeling of the Mughrabi quarter is part of a larger project called "Open Jerusalem", which has brought together some 60 researchers who have collated and this week put online an archive of about 40,000 documents in 12 languages on the history of Jerusalem.

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